

Should you work between undergrad and grad school?

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College seniors have some big decisions to make upon graduation. Where will they live? What career will they pursue? Should they attend graduate school? And if additional education is the next step, should they go right back to school or take time off and work instead?

Working between undergraduate and graduate school has its advantages. "A graduate student can benefit so much more from graduate school after working in the 'real world' for two years or so," says Bettina Seidman, [career coach](#) with Seidbet Associates, a career management company. "Friends and colleagues of mine who teach management courses agree. They tell me that the level of understanding and class participation is much higher among students who are working or who have worked."

Working before beginning a [graduate program](#) may not be right for every person or major. Here are six factors college graduates should consider when deciding whether to work between undergraduate and graduate school.

1. Does your school require experience?

Conduct research to determine whether the specialty you're pursuing or the program you'd like to attend requires you to have work experience before starting -- or being accepted. According to online graduate school directory [GradSchools.com](#), there are some professions -- [doctor](#), [lawyer](#) or [educator](#), for instance -- that usually require some work experience prior to graduate school. Sometimes, it may be mandatory to receive schooling while working. And as the site points out, while some schools may not require it, having real-world experience never hurts and may actually enhance your time at graduate school.

2. Do you know what you want to specialize in?

Perhaps you're still figuring out exactly what career path you want to take and if that path even requires a graduate degree. Or maybe you're interested in something business related, for example, but you aren't yet sure what kind of specialty within business you want to pursue. Gaining work experience can help to either confirm, or rule out, a particular focus area. If you think you want to go in one direction but aren't 100 percent sure, look for a job that lets you try the specialty on for size. If you're indecisive, seek out a position where you'll be working across a variety of roles. That way you can see what comes most naturally to you and what may not be as appealing.

3. Can you get a job in a related field?

If you're planning to work, see what the hiring environment is like for your particular area of interest. If it's challenging to get a job in your discipline, consider volunteering or applying for an internship.

"When working between undergrad and grad school, it is extremely important to consider the relevancy of the work experience," says Lynda Zugec, managing director at The Workforce Consultants. "In some instances, it may be best to volunteer in order to gain experiences in a field applicable to the intended grad school studies, rather than obtaining paid work in an area that may be less pertinent. Working within the field will demonstrate an interest in pursuing related grad-school studies for the long haul and provide a sense of what the field entails."

4. Does the experience add value?

While working between undergraduate and graduate school certainly has its benefits, make sure you're not working just to work and that you're gaining experience that will add value to your education. "As far as the type of work a potential applicant should look for, the bottom line is how well that experience will enable you to add value to the classroom experience and contribute to group assignments," says Bruce Bachenheimer, clinical professor of management at Pace University's Lubin School of Business in New York.

5. Do you need the financial boost?

A major factor to consider is whether you're financially able to go straight to graduate school post-college. Create a spreadsheet that includes the various expenses associated with the program, such as the school itself, housing, meals, transportation and some disposable income. Chances are you'll need to work while you're at school anyway, but for some, getting a [financial](#) head start will help ease the transition.

6. Are you ready to go back to school?

After going to school for 16 years straight, it's understandable if you need a break before putting your learning cap on again. You shouldn't feel guilty for taking some time off from sitting through long lectures or cramming for exams. Also, consider the fact that graduate school will likely be different from your experience as an undergrad. While high-school graduates attending college typically go straight to get their undergraduate degree, people attend graduate school at all different ages and experience levels. While you might be zero to a few years out of school, your classmates might be 10 to 20 years older than you.

So if you think spending some time in the "real world" will help you better prepare for the graduate-school lifestyle, take all the time you need.